

Study links exercise with family life

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CANADIAN PRESS

Fitness

As a Toronto stock trader, David Stephens is used to fluctuations, including in his exercise habits, which tend to ride the tide of his family responsibilities.

Stephens' up-and-down fitness regimen isn't unusual.

A new study concludes family composition plays a large role in whether someone makes exercise a priority.

Those living with a partner or who are widowed, divorced or separated don't exercise as regularly as never-marrieds, says the 1995 survey of about 2,500 adults.

Stephens, 35, was more active after his divorce and before his second marriage and the birth of his first child, when he cut back somewhat to fit in fatherly duties.

After working up to more regular exercise, he plans to put his fitness membership at the Plaza Club in downtown Toronto on hold after his second child is born, and work out more at home.

"For the first month or so after the baby is born I want to make sure my wife is comfortable before I take off for work in the morning," says Stephens, who'd leave his home in Aurora and hit the gym about 6:15 a.m.

before heading to the brokerage firm Scotia McLeod.

The survey, conducted by the Canadian Fitness and Lifestyle Research Institute in Ottawa, suggests about a third of Canadians are active only twice a week or less. That's well below the recommended level of at least every other day, for a minimum of 30 minutes, at a moderate intensity or greater, to gain important health benefits.

Of the 2,500 assessed for their exercise habits and intentions, about 58 per cent of never-marrieds were active at least every other day compared with 54 per cent of men and women with partners and 42 per cent who are widowed, divorced or separated.

Younger adults and men tend to exercise more often than older adults and women, researchers noted. And since never-marrieds are typically much younger, they're usually more active.

Spirit Synott, a never-married Toronto freelance artist, says exercise has helped put her life in perspective.

Although she's lost the use of her legs, Synott, 31, works out nearly daily, including 5-kilometre wheelchair races, stretch-



CP PHOTO

FITS PROFILE: Toronto artist and writer Spirit Synott works out daily, despite being in a wheelchair.

ing, weight training, kayaking and other outdoor activities.

And she dates only men who are also activity oriented.

"Despite my independence, I

need someone in good shape who can do these activities with me. I'd be most attracted to a man who can live an active life with me."